



Central Mortgage
and Housing Corporation

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for Urban Affairs

Société centrale
d'hypothèques et de logement

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Information / Renseignements

Housing
Research
Priorities
for 1978-1979

Les objectifs prioritaires
de 1978-1979
de la recherche
en habitation

Information / Renseignements

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY RESEARCH PRIORITIES FOR 1978/1979

INTRODUCTION

Over the past several years, researchers in universities, policy institutes, and private consulting firms have been seeking a statement of Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation priorities to which they might better relate their own efforts. This desire for a clearer understanding of CMHC research priorities arose from the alteration of the Corporation's policy from a "responsive" toward a "directed" approach. Under the former policy, the responsibility for producing acceptable research proposals lay with the would-be external contractor.

"Directed" research is that specifically requested by CMHC in order to achieve public policy objectives. It is initiated by individual units of the Corporation in order to address identified social, economic, and technological issues facing Canadians in the housing and community fields. Typically, it has been associated with practical matters of policy and operations under the National Housing Act.

A large proportion of NHA research funds since 1974 have been devoted to matters of especial concern to CMHC. But two important avenues have remained open for financing of researcher-conceived projects: funding provided to organizations like the Institute for Urban Studies, and funding provided to individuals under the university and open fellowship programs. Both of these



approaches have resulted in studies undertaken on topics of specific interest to the researchers but falling within certain broad categories elaborated by CMHC on behalf of the Federal government.

It is now apparent that the space between very sharply defined research projects of immediate practical use for public policy and operations and very widely drawn boundaries for funding eligibility can and should be filled. The aim of this statement is to set out subject areas which achieve this objective. To do so, the subjects selected must meet the following criteria:

1. RELEVANCE TO PROBLEMS IN HOUSING MARKETS
OR HOUSING PROGRAMS

Both those undertaking research projects and the Federal government share an interest in studies which lead either immediately or over the longer term to positive action to improve housing and living conditions.

2. CAPACITY TO BE FEASIBLY RESEARCHED

"Research" can comprise a range of activities from thinking and writing essays to the assembly and analysis of large scale data bases or experimental results. These activities nevertheless have boundaries set by researcher time available, the capacity to mobilize research teams, and the extant data and information which have been collected.



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3. CAPACITY TO CROSS DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES
AND PROMPT MULTIDISCIPLINARY EFFORT

Housing and the community environment are inherently economic, social, and physical all at the same time. Studies may need to have a single disciplinary focus but they need to draw upon a wide range of other perspectives as well.

4. INTRINSIC INTEREST TO THOSE NOW ENGAGED
IN HOUSING AND COMMUNITY RESEARCH

The conduct of research is itself a social and psychological process in which the motivation of the researcher is a key factor. Topics need to have intrinsic interest in order to sustain effort over the substantial periods of hard and sometimes tedious work involved.

It is clearly not possible to devise research topics which meet all of the above criteria perfectly. Such criteria can, nevertheless, be consciously borne in mind and approached.

There are many possible ways in which a priority research topic could be expressed. More than a simple one line statement is necessary in order to give the prospective researcher a flavour of the subject matter. The chosen mode of expression is to briefly and concisely set out the essence of the problem which is considered to exist. It is fully expected that those engaged in different disciplines will then want to recast the problem statement in their own terms, and/or to subdivide it into smaller parts.

PRIORITY RESEARCH TOPICS IN THE FIELD OF HOUSING

There are five priorities for 1978/79 in the housing field:

- the second order effects of housing policies and programs on the Canadian housing stock;
- the long term impact of demographic changes on the utilization of housing;
- the need for rehabilitation, modernization and conversion of existing housing units;
- the costs and benefits of housing programs directed to specific target groups in the Canadian population;
- the potential for and problems associated with the wider use of renewable sources of energy to provide residential space and water heating.

Each of these will be more fully elaborated in turn. The order of their expression is not to be interpreted as a ranking.

1. SECOND ORDER EFFECTS OF HOUSING POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

Canadians are constantly moving around within the housing stock. Some of their decisions are shaped by such Federal initiatives as the Assisted Home Ownership Program. It is important to know what kinds of housing units are being left behind by those who move into

government-aided housing. Specifically, there is a need to know whether there is a net improvement in the overall situation of low income people as a result of various government initiatives.

2. IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES ON HOUSING UTILIZATION

Most forecasts of future housing requirements now envisage a lower level of new production in the next decade. In addition, it is believed that households will be smaller and the average age of their members higher. All of these shifts will affect the construction industry, the design of new housing, the pattern of housing demand, and the policy instruments required. It is essential to trace the implications of demographic changes as completely as possible so that public policy can lead and not lag.

3. NEED FOR HOUSING STOCK MODERNIZATION

Some \$2 billion is expended annually to repair the Canadian housing stock. A limited but increasing proportion of this is provided via the Residential Rehabilitation Assistance Program administered by CMHC. There is a need to know the rate at which additional units are being "recruited" into the substandard housing stock, the degree to which whole segments of the stock are likely to need modernization, e.g., to increase energy efficiency, and the degree to which private investment will be sufficient to maintain and improve the stock.

4. COSTS AND BENEFITS OF TARGETTED HOUSING PROGRAMS

Over the past twenty-five years, a number of programs have been established to produce dwellings restricted to people in defined categories of need, e.g., the low income elderly. It is important to understand the progress which has been made in meeting these needs and the comparative costs and benefits of targetted, single purpose programs, compared with other, more general programs.

5. USE OF RENEWABLE SOURCES OF ENERGY FOR RESIDENTIAL HEATING

Much has been said recently, about the need to reduce Canada's dependency on fossil fuels. Residential space and water heating account for some 20% of all energy used. If renewable energy sources are to be adopted however, the behavioural institutional, financial, and other problems associated with their application will need to be more fully grasped.

PRIORITY RESEARCH TOPICS IN THE FIELD OF THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

There are three 1978/79 priority areas of research in relation to the community environment:

- the costs to both public and private sector participants of different patterns of residential development;
- the impact of long term demographic shifts on the utilization of community facilities closely associated with residential developments;

- the ways in which the design and technology of residential communities can be changed to reduce their vulnerability to hazards, to reduce their adverse impact on the natural environment, and to increase their long term energy efficiency.

The Ministry of State for Urban Affairs naturally has a continuing interest in all of the above priorities as well. Provincial and municipal agencies, because directly involved in community services policy and administration, are likely to be keenly interested in research results.

1. COSTS OF ALTERNATIVE PATTERNS OF RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

It is well known that the costs of developing and continuously servicing different residential densities and layouts vary substantially. But there is little Canadian literature on these cost relationships in detail and, more important, on the prospects of different strategies for cost savings.

2. IMPACT OF DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS

As noted, changes are likely to occur in housing demand and supply as a result of slower population growth and of aging. These will be paralleled in the demand for and supply of social, recreational, and other facilities and infrastructure directly linked with its production.

3. LOW IMPACT COMMUNITY DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

As the pressing need for housing and community facilities to meet burgeoning population growth slackens, there will be a respite to consider more fully and effectively the quality and impact of community technology. It can be made more flexible and appropriate to the needs of people, and the biosphere as a whole.

UTILIZATION OF THIS STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PRIORITIES

The issuance of this statement of research priorities should not be interpreted as a call for funding requests from external researchers. The normal process of calling for competitive proposals from the inventory of researchers listed with the Corporation will continue. Those who are interested in participating in this competitive process are asked to write to:

Dr. Michael Binder,
Planning and Project
Coordination Division,
Central Mortgage and Housing
Corporation,
Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0P7

It is intended that the present statement of priorities will help researchers in the following kinds of ways:

- university and community college students undertaking theses or term papers may wish to select a subject from within the priority list and address a case study, or some specific aspect of the whole;

- university and community college faculty members may wish to develop their own research programs to pursue some major element of the priorities using locally available data and information;
- research institutes may wish to conduct exploratory seminars, adopting one or more of the priorities as a theme and then guiding numbers into an integrated "package" of study areas to result in a publication series.

Of course, the above are just examples. The statement of priorities does not mean to confine or to close off other, competing areas of personal research, only to help to place their selection into context.

Additional copies of this statement and questions about it may be addressed to:

CMHC Research Priorities,
c/o Mr. Michael Pine,
Program Policy and Research Sector,
Central Mortgage and Housing
Corporation,
Ottawa, Canada
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